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Dirty Dancing With Race and Class: Microaggressions Toward First-Generation and Low-Income College Students of Color

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Abstract

Using a raceclass analysis, which positions race and class as inextricably linked, this reflective and conceptual paper will explore how racialized and classed, or *raceclassist*, microaggressions impact first-generation and low-income college students of color. Utilizing counterstorytelling and theoretical analysis, the first author shares her counterstory as a starting point to understand and analyze the impact *raceclassist* microaggressions have on racially and economically minoritized students. We consider the implications of raceclassist microaggressions toward first-generation and low-income college students of color. We also pose recommendations for addressing raceclassist microaggressions in terms of practice in student affairs and institutions of higher education.

Keywords

college students of color, counterstorytelling, first-generation, low-income, microaggressions, raceclass

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Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives

Race and class in education are intertwined partners. They create a tango that negatively impacts college students who belong to racially and economically minoritized groups. We use racially minoritized instead of "minority" in the same fashion as Gillborn (2005) and Harper (2012) to designate that people of color are subordinated and minoritized by the social construction and systemic maintenance of Whiteness, White supremacy, and racism rather than a simple minority group compared to a majority. Similarly, we use economically minoritized as Zine (2004) did because students from low-income and working-class backgrounds are systematically minoritized by capitalism. Taken together, race and class commingle to work against college students of color from low-income backgrounds; therefore, this is not a beautiful and graceful dance to behold, but a destructive and dirty performance of racism and classism operating together in the same way dancers move in unison.

This metaphorical dance occurs when race and class in education collide to negatively impact the educational experience of racially and economically minoritized college students. For instance, the dance can be witnessed when a White, middle-class college classmate presumes that the presence of a student of color is due to receiving an unearned scholarship or participation in collegiate sports. Or, it can be enacted during an advising meeting when a White faculty member presupposes a student of color is a transfer student from a community college, even after examining transcripts that clearly indicate the contrary. On the surface, these examples may appear to be focused on race; however, there is a simultaneously classed element to them as well. The classed assumption that a student of color cannot afford to attend college and has otherwise not "earned" a place in college undergirds the idea that a student of color must be attending college on an unearned scholarship or as a transfer student from a community college. Consequently, the racist assumption and classist belief support one another, cannot be easily separated, and, therefore, move in concert with each other. In this way, race and class operate as a dance because one influences the other just as coordinated partners waltz together.

To explore this dirty dance, we chose to focus on students of color who are both the first generation in their families to attend college and from low-income backgrounds. Due to their simultaneous membership in both racially and economically minoritized groups, first-generation college students of color from low-income backgrounds experience the dance between race and class in education, replete with accompanying maneuvers that manifest in others' behaviors, speech, and ideologies toward them, in unique ways (Museus & Griffin, 2011).

We acknowledge that the experiences described above are racial microaggressions, covert acts of racism aimed at people of color as a subtle way to maintain White supremacy, whether intentional or unconscious on the part of the perpetrator (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). However, the above microaggressions are also classed because the implicit biases in such speech or discursive practices are not only about race; they are also about perceived class associations based on students' skin color. With respect to Leonardo's (2013) concept of *raceclass*, where one is inseparable from the other, this paper posits how these experiences are *raceclassist* microaggressions that continue to manifest in higher education and, in doing so, impede first-generation and low-income college students of color. Such biases lead to assumptions about college attendance, aspirations, and aptitude, which affect the way racially and economically minoritized college students move through the college experience.

Raceclassist speech and actions become part of the synchronized yet inelegant dance involving both race and class in education (Leonardo, 2013).

This critically reflective paper draws heavily from Leonardo's (2013) concept of raceclass as a theoretical grounding to reexamine the counterstory of one of the authors who as a low-income first-generation student of color experienced raceclassist microaggressions. We begin with a theoretical framework to situate our analysis. Then, we explicate our methodology and engage in a theoretical analysis of the counterstory of one author's experiences in higher education as a student. Finally, we consider the implications of raceclassist microaggressions in student affairs and provide recommendations to mitigate raceclassist microaggressions at higher educational institutions.

Theoretical Frame

According to Leonardo (2013), race stemmed from the connection of human differences with variations in skin color. He problematized race by expounding on the limitations of the concept of race as defined by critical race theory (CRT). Within CRT, race is assumed, and indeed foregrounded, but a concerted effort to define race or come to an agreement on its definition is severely lacking. This gives rise to ideological debates on what constitutes race or racial groups and the conflation of other concepts, such as ethnicity and nationality without offering a clear direction for addressing these limitations. Thus, while racially minoritized groups utilize race as a unifying concept in the struggle against White supremacy, even building pride and strength around racialized identities, the concept of race itself remains vague and without consensus.

Similarly, Leonardo (2013) exposed the limitations of a conceptualization of race within a Marxist framework. Marxism approaches race tepidly as a mere idea—often encapsulated by "scare quotes" as "race"—that "does not capture what is actually transpiring, or the division of labor, but hides behind naturalized assumptions of social groups based on something as arbitrary as skin color" (Leonardo, 2013, p. 76). Instead of standing on its own as it does in CRT, race functions in Marxism only as an offshoot of class relations because racial disparities stem from divisions of labor. Thus, it leads to an inconsistent approach to race and makes defining race in a Marxist framework challenging.

Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) acknowledged that race and racism intersect "with other forms of subordination" (p. 63), including class. Marx and Engels (1845) defined class as a group with "communal interests" bonded together by a "mutual interdependence of all the individuals among whom the labour is divided" (p. 168). In traditional Marxist discourse, these groups with a shared relationship to labor and the means of production are divided into two main classifications: the propertied class, or bourgeoisie, who control the means of production, and the propertyless, or working class, who exchange their labor for wages (Leonardo, 2012). In addition to these central classes, Marxism acknowledges other classes, such as the quasiclass of the middle class (Leonardo, 2012) and dangerous class (Preston, 2010), beyond the traditional two-class classification.

This understanding of class through a Marxist lens coupled with the discussion of the standing of race within CRT and Marxism helps in understanding how the two sway in unison. Leonardo (2013) asserted that CRT views race and class as interrelated and uses a racial discourse to encompass discussions of classism. On its own, race in CRT offers a focused perspective on racial issues in education, yet within Marxism the

economic repercussions of racism stem from capitalism rather than race alone (Leonardo, 2013). Recognizing the philosophical tension between CRT and Marxism, Preston (2010) warned that "it would be incorrect to caricature critical race theorists as being preoccupied with 'race' and Marxists considered to be preoccupied by 'class,'" and instead drew from both traditions rather than pitting them against each other (p. 116). Similarly, Leonardo (2013) implored for partnering race and class to understand how they influence education together. Through a call for a "raceclass analysis of education," where race and class represent "two intimately related points on one axis," Leonardo (2013) insisted that an understanding of what race and class bring collectively to the educational dance floor is needed (p. 28). Responding to this call, we offer a raceclass analysis that is neither strictly CRT nor Marxist in nature but requires an examination of how race and class are coupled together to get at their collective impact on students of color from low-income backgrounds in higher education. Specifically, we draw significantly from Leonardo's (2013) postulation of raceclass and how that postulation applies to raceclassist microaggressions in higher education.

The single word raceclass serves as a visible orthographic and linguistic reminder that "race relations are partners…with capitalism and one cannot be understood without the other" (Leonardo, 2013, p. 63). Thus, we use the concept of raceclass to illuminate the dance between race and class in the context of the higher education system in the United States because they must be understood as an entangled pair rather than two separate issues. Within higher education, we posit that raceclass has been historically presented through the notion of the "great equalizer" in which education purports to provide a viable avenue for racially and economically minoritized students to transcend racism and social class by pulling themselves up by

their bootstraps. This imaginary bootstraps myth is based on a meritocratic ideology supported and maintained by Whiteness (McIntyre, 2002). According to Manglitz (2003), the "social construction of Whiteness refers to the ways that White and all other racial identities have been historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced over time" by way of racial domination, White privilege, and cultural practices that serve to reinforce Whiteness (p. 122). Inside of higher education, Whiteness perpetuates the domination of White power structures over students, staff, and faculty of color (Brunsma, Brown, & Placier, 2013).

The false meritocratic ideology of the great equalizer myth is also maintained by capitalism. Drawing from Johnson (2006), modern capitalism strives to create wealth as capitalists exploit their workers' labor in order to profit from the production of goods and services. Returning to the Marxist conception of class, the capitalists to which Johnson (2006) referred are the propertied class who control the means of production, while the working class are the laborers. The resultant wealth and financial inequalities produced by this economic system ensures the perpetuation of White supremacy, White privilege, and racism because "the idea of whiteness" developed to "define a privileged social category [that] elevated [White people] above everyone who wasn't included in it" (Johnson, 2006, pp. 46–47).

Given the oppressive nature of both Whiteness and capitalism and their connection, students of color and low socioeconomic status students are often unable to benefit from the individual agency dogma of the great equalizer myth—except for a few tokenized "role models" (Delgado, 1991)—because they do not have access to "advantages inherent in a system where hard work and merit are embedded in a system of racial hierarchy" (McIntyre, 2002, p. 42).

This "system" then advances the majoritarian idea that individual hard work and effort is all that is needed to improve one's station in life while ignoring the role White supremacy, racism, and capitalism play in preventing successful outcomes for racially and economically minoritized students. That is, while the maintenance of White supremacy and capitalism require society at large, as well as parents, administrators, and teachers, to recycle the old great equalizer trope and students (especially White students) to buy into it, it does not promote the outcomes it purports to for most racially minoritized and poor students. As such, although this rags-to-riches Horatio Alger story is recycled, it is often not commonplace; hence the rarity of such success stories. Simply put, education is not the great equalizer when it comes to the status and outcomes of people of color and poor and working-class folks in the United States.

We believe one aspect of the system of oppression that helps maintain White supremacy and allows the raceclassist great equalizer myth to go unchallenged is racial microaggressions, which serve as subtle yet ever-present racist occurrences targeting minoritized groups (Matias, 2012). Sue et al. (2007) defined racial microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" and further divide microaggressions into three categories: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (p. 273). Microassaults are overt acts of racism, such as using racial epithets or actively avoiding interactions with people of color. Because of their explicit nature, microassaults are not the focus of this paper, warranting more attention to the subtler yet no less harmful microinsults and microinvalidations. Microinsults denigrate people of color with co-

vertly insulting messages, such as "the most qualified students got into college, regardless of race," as if to imply that students of color are somehow less qualified than their White counterparts. Similarly, microinvalidations deny the lived experiences of people of color, as seen in the claims "I don't see color; I just see people" and "the only color that matters is green (money)," which attempt to negate the reality of living as a person of color within a racist, White supremacist, and classist system. Both microinsults and microinvalidations serve to remind people of color of their subordinated, and oftentimes subhuman, position in society.

Although perpetrated by individuals, racial microaggressions are part of the larger, systemic structure that disadvantages minoritized groups while holding up Whiteness as the ideal (Solórzano et al., 2000) and perpetuating White racism as a means to maintain capitalism (Johnson, 2006). Previous scholarship has shown how racial microaggressions have impacted college campus climates (Harper, 2009; Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002; Watkins, LaBarrie, & Appio, 2010). The concept of microaggressions has also been expanded beyond race to sexual orientation (Nadal, Issa, Leon, & Meterko, 2011; Sue, 2010; Woodford, Howell, Kulick, & Silverschanz, 2013), gender (Capodilupo et al., 2010; McCabe, 2009; Solórzano, 1998), religion (Nadal, Issa, Griffin, Hamit, & Lyons, 2010), and class (Mao, Smith, Deshpande, & Bowen, 2011; Smith & Redington, 2010).

However, microaggressions that explicitly lie at the intersection of multiple identities have not been addressed. Within CRT, Crenshaw (1991) "used the concept of intersectionality to denote the various ways in which [multiple identities]…interact to shape the multiple dimensions" of one's lived experience (p. 1244). That is, intersectionality helps account for the myriad ways different identities

work together in the continued oppression of people of color. As an example, race and gender collectively impact the experience of domestic violence against women of color in ways distinct from that of White women (Crenshaw, 1991). Likewise, for the racially and economically minoritized college students experiencing microaggressions, we argue that their dual identity intensifies the impact of such encounters. It is important to note that students of color who have a family history of college attendance, White students from low-income backgrounds, and other students who are not members of both racially and economically minoritized groups experience the dance between race and class differently because they lack the intersectional identity with both groups (Museus & Griffin, 2011). Plainly, a student belonging to only one of these identity groups may feel discriminated against based on one identity, but a racially and economically minoritized student will experience microaggressions differently as a student of color from a low-income background. This is not to claim greater victimhood or a higher rank on a "hierarchy of oppression that is based on the assumption that having multiple marginalized identities simply equates to more experienced discrimination" (Museus & Griffin, 2011, p. 8), but it adds to an understanding of how college students of color experience microaggressions targeting their multiple marginalized identities.

We acknowledge that microaggressions are multifaceted and put forth that microaggressions lie at the intersection of multiple positionalities. As we focus on the intersectionality of race and class for the purpose of this paper, we advance that raceclassist microaggressions are subtle digs targeted at people of color due to their perceived belonging to a lower class position and the racist assumption that racially minoritized people must be from poor or working-class backgrounds. Just as Leonardo (2013) argued that "the

racial dimension of daily, even mundane, exchanges become significant if we consider their compound effect of demoralizing and psychologically breaking down people of color in institutional settings" (p. 19), we argue that dually racialized and classed microaggressions impose a heavy burden on first-generation and low-income college students of color. We engage raceclass as a specific form of intersectionality because it encompasses the saliency of both racially and economically minoritized identities for first-generation and low-income college students of color. So, it is not that raceclass is more important than other identities, but that it becomes a significant touchstone of identity when facing raceclassist microaggressions. Preston (2010) stated that "concrete racism or white supremacy (where whites oppress people of colour) only grasps part of the story of racial domination under capitalism" (p. 117). We posit that raceclassist microaggressions indeed encompass another part of the story in higher education for first-generation and low-income college students of color and use the frame of Leonardo's raceclass paired with microaggressions to explore the counterstory of one of our authors as a first-generation and low-income student of color in college.

Methodology

To explore how raceclassist microaggressions play a role in the experience of first-generation and low-income college students of color, we methodologically employ CRT's counterstorytelling. The methodology of counterstorytelling presents an opportunity to share a personal narrative from a person of color to challenge the majoritarian stories, which maintain White supremacy (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), by allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how raceclassist microaggressions affect racially and economically minoritized college students. Leonardo (2013) argued that race has an intimate

relation to one's personhood, so employing counterstorytelling helps to unveil the personal side of race in the face of raceclassist microaggressions toward first-generation and low-income college students. We then draw from our theoretical framework to analyze the counterstory to make explicit the impact of raceclassist microaggressions on racially and economically minoritized college students.

Before delving into the counterstory of our first author, Sarcedo, it is imperative to state her positionalities. Sarcedo is a mixed woman of color, considered "bi-racial-looking" or visually identified as part-Black (hooks, 1996, p. 127). Currently, she works as an academic advisor while pursuing her doctorate of philosophy in education. Sarcedo was raised in a working-class, single-mother household with two siblings amid the largest urban city in San Diego County, California, where she attended low-performing public schools. As a first-generation and low-income undergraduate, she attended a predominantly Asian/Asian American and White public university in northern California, post-Prop 209 and Prop 227 (see Hajnal, Gerber, & Louch, 2002). These background characteristics invariably shape Sarcedo's lived experience of raceclassist microaggressions, which also influences the way we, the authors as scholars of color and White allies, interpret her counterstory. Facing microaggressions can often be dismissed because they are, by definition, subtle, vague, or hidden (Sue et al., 2007), so we strenuously acknowledge that microaggressions have very real effects (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Sue et al., 2007) and seek to use Sarcedo's counterstory to illuminate how raceclassist microaggressions are experienced by first-generation and low-income college students of color.

Concerning racially and economically minoritized students, majoritarian stories of education often pose a deficit-based

perspective where "disadvantaged" students of color need to change their thoughts, behaviors, culture, and/or language in order to be academically successful instead of holding educational institutions accountable for ways in which they minoritize students of color. For example, Pike and Kuh (2005) claimed that an "institution of higher education cannot change the lineage of its students. But it can implement interventions that increase the odds that first-generation college students 'get ready,' 'get in,' and 'get through' by changing the way those students view college and by altering what they do after they arrive" (p. 292). In another example of deficit thinking, Vivian (2005) lamented that faculty often perceive "at-risk" college students as passive and apathetic, so faculty distance themselves from "the students that are the most difficult to reach" (p. 336). More recently, Mehta, Newbold, and O'Rourke (2011) focused on lower levels of campus engagement, academic achievement, and social support among first-generation college students in the onerously titled "Why Do First-Generation Students Fail?" From the outset, Mehta et al. (2011) took a deficit approach, dictating a deficit-based answer and only allowing for a cursory nod to what makes students successful.

The preceding examples of deficit thinking permeate the literature. By encouraging institutions to change the way "those" students think and act, allowing faculty to disengage, or putting the onus for success on the students only, institutions of higher education are encouraging students of color to drop their cultural wealth (Yosso & Garcia, 2007) in order to adopt a Whitened education system (Matias, 2013). The effects of deficit thinking and promoting assimilation of students of color forces racially and economically minoritized students to have negative experiences in college, such as the one described in Sarcedo's counterstory and further explored in our analysis of her counterstory.

Short sections from Sarcedo's personal narrative will not provide an unmediated view into the experience of all first-generation and low-income college students of color (Cousins, 2010), but it is useful in adding to our understanding of how students of color navigate racial microaggressions in confluence with other forms of subordination. The tradition of self-study in education can be instrumental in making the private public as a means to explore and draw from these "learnings" to meld theory and practice (Loughran, 2007). Inspired by Cornel West, Milner (2007) argued that one must emancipate herself before she can work towards emancipating others, meaning as scholars, we must first critically reexamine our own lives before laying claims on others; we must examine the view from our own lenses before looking at others through them. Counterstorytelling becomes a way to reinvestigate our marginalized lives, and the process of reinvestigation supports socially just qualitative inquiry (Matias, 2012). As such, to better support future socially just qualitative research, we first include self-reflection and analysis as ways to "engage in processes that reject the exploitation, misinterpretation, and misrepresentation of people and communities of color" (Milner, 2007, p. 395). Thus, the act of researching the experience of others begins with (re)searching one's own experience.

Raceclassist Microaggressions and the First-Generation and Low-Income Student of Color

As a first-generation and low-income college student of color, Sarcedo experienced the dance between race and class in education on countless occasions through intermittent overt acts of raceclassism, but mainly through subtler microaggressions at the hands of students, faculty, and staff. It was as subtle as a career counselor pushing her to pursue a job after college rather than a

graduate education or a student affairs officer discouraging participation in a reputable national honors society. A particularly memorable raceclassist experience occurred during a small group discussion in her introduction to educational psychology class. Below is her autoethnographic counterstory:

My small group consisted of three White women, Piper, Skyler, and Dot, and me. Our assignment was to discuss the educational trajectories of the characters from Disney's Lilo and Stitch using different educational and developmental theories. I anticipated it would be a fun conversation, but the discussion soon turned from the assignment to our own educational trajectories. I couldn't relate to their excited shrieks about spring break service learning and study abroad trips because even if I could take time off of the two jobs I worked while attending school full-time, I couldn't afford those trips or ask my single mother to help fund it. I felt as if I had nothing to contribute to this conversation and kept silent. They proceeded to talk about hiring tutors and buying new computers without including me as if I weren't even there. This small group felt very isolating to me.

Skyler finally mentioned taking advanced classes in high school, something to which I could finally relate. In an effort to join the conversation, I complained I was still upset that I had taken International Baccalaureate (IB) classes in high school but felt that they didn't help me directly in college as I was promised. Piper exclaimed, "Oh my god, I did IB, too! I totally know what you mean…I would've never guessed you did IB." Her statement stung as I tried to hide my discomfort. What was it about me that made her think I couldn't take IB classes? I looked down at my tattered school sweatshirt and thrift store jeans with my brown skin showing through the holes in the knees. I finally responded, "I feel really fortunate that I was able to even do IB. My school almost lost our program." Piper

remarked, "Wow, my school had to expand our IB program. I probably would have just taken more AP classes instead or transferred schools if we lost it, but that would never happen." I felt my cheeks flush with embarrassment at my high school's lack of academic programs compared to Piper's confidence in her school's wealth of academic options.

I'm not sure if they sensed my discomfort, but Dot changed the subject. "Are any of you going to take the GRE?" she asked. Beaming, Piper proudly declared that she was definitely going to take the GRE next year. I was still sitting there silently racking my brain, nervously twirling my multiracial curls accentuated by the day's heat. "What's the GRE?" I hesitantly asked in all sincerity. Immediately, my White groupmates erupted into laughter at my lack of knowledge. No, not just laughter; it felt as if they were mocking me and snickering as if my nescience was hilariously worthy of ridicule. Their laughter was far more isolating than ignoring me earlier in the conversation had been.

"No, I'm serious. What is the GRE?" I implored after a minute. Dot finally said matter-of-factly with clear annoyance in her voice, "I take it you're not going to grad school. The GRE is like the SAT for grad school." She raised a smug, professionally waxed eyebrow as if to question if I even knew what grad school was. Her thin-lipped smile contorted into a grimace as I said, "I'm considering graduate school." Dot audibly gasped. Her shock at my graduate education aspirations made me question my goals. Was graduate school a viable option for me? As Dot shifted uncomfortably in her chair, I felt as if I didn't belong in that conversation, in that classroom, or at that university.

Now it was Skyler's turn to break the awkward silence. "I'm not looking forward to the GRE if I end up taking it." The others agreed and I nodded my agreement, knowing I hadn't done

well on the SAT, while sitting in a class where we discussed standardized test biases just weeks before. Then Skyler looked at me with a concerned look on her face as she asked, "How do you feel about maybe going to grad school since no one else in your family has gone?" I had not disclosed that I was a first-generation student in the course of the conversation. Her question caused me to clench my jaw in anger and frustration, so I felt the need to excuse myself. I "accidently" kicked Skyler's Kate Spade handbag on my way to the door. Pacing outside of the classroom to calm my nerves, I hoped I never had to work in a group with these women ever again.

Embedded in this counterstory are examples of raceclassist microaggressions that bumped and bruised Sarcedo throughout her college experience as a result of the dance between race and class in education. For example, in Piper's verbal microinvalidation, "I would've never guessed you did IB" and Dot's microinsulting questioningly raised eyebrow, there is an underlying raceclassist assumption that students of color and folks from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are not academically adept enough to take on high-level coursework. Gusa (2010) argued that "White, middle-, and upper-class students…assume that they have superior skills and a greater right to be in college than do students of color" (p. 472). According to this raceclassist assumption, Piper's "White sense of intellectual superiority" and investment in "the perceived lower cognitive capacities of…students of color" dictated that a racially and economically minoritized student could not possibly be in the same academic realm with her as a White, middle-class student (Leonardo, 2013, p. 121). This also reflects an ascription of intelligence commonly folded into racial microaggressions, whereby the perpetrator makes assumptions about the intelligence of a person of color (Sue et al., 2007; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). In the case of raceclassist

microaggressions, the ascription of intelligence is tied to both race and perceived class. Through these mechanisms, White supremacy maintains itself by allowing students like Piper and Dot to conceptualize communities of color and poor communities as below the station of White, middle-class communities without saying or doing anything overtly racist (Gillborn, 2005) or classist because it is obscured by microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007).

Moreover, it is not just Piper's derogatory thoughts and microaggressive words that supported White supremacy but also the underlying systemic material power of raceclassism. Leonardo (2013) argued that "[a]ttitudes are a function of their material determinations" (p. 58), meaning that her words carried with them the weight of an entire system of racial and class oppression. In essence, Piper was able to think the way she did and say what she said because she is backed up by a raceclassist education system that disproportionately funnels students of color and poor students into substandard educational settings as a matter of course (Hiraldo, 2010). There is material power in excluding students of color from academic spaces, even if it is just with words on the surface. These microaggressions are embedded within and serve to maintain a raceclassist educational system to the detriment of first-generation and low-income college students of color.

Even Sarcedo's response to Piper's microaggression points to her complicity in maintaining the White status quo in that she did not counter the statement but instead acquiesced to being "really fortunate" to have access to an education that Piper saw as her White right. This is an example of how a racially and economically minoritized student can unknowingly buy into a majoritarian perspective (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and support the oppressor's representation of the

oppressed (Leonardo, 2013). Suffice it to say, Sarcedo was, indeed, co-creating Whiteness with Piper. Matias and DiAngelo (2013) argued that such a co-creation ultimately makes people of color racially *cray-cray* because as they are forced to comply with or remain complicit to Whiteness, it then produces a state of utter racial craziness.

Pedagogically speaking, this exchange served a raceclassist *educative function* by teaching Piper, and the rest of the group, that it was appropriate to consider Sarcedo less-than (Leonardo, 2013). It should be no wonder these White women saw fit to laugh at her unawareness regarding the GRE. Perpetrating raceclassist assumptions in education allows White students and their false majoritarian perspective to push forward the dance between race and class.

When Piper further asserted that she had access to AP courses and that the IB program at her school would "never" be halted and, in fact, had to be expanded, she tacitly points to the unequal distribution of school resources common between White, middle-class schools and schools serving racially and economically minoritized students. This unequal distribution of school resources invariably impacts first-generation and low-income college students' access to and success in higher education (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). This is another example of how raceclassist microaggressions have the material power to keep race and class dancing within education because Piper's statements bared the underlying assumption that losing a major academic program could only happen at a "bad" school, which meant a school serving largely racially and economically minoritized students. Furthermore, her statement contended that if it was even a possibility at her school, her family had the resources and financial wherewithal to simply send her to a different academically rigorous school without any trouble. This

reflects Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) idea of the "good school" standard, which represents an unspoken racialized and classed assumption that holds up "good," meaning White, middle-class communities as the ideal and necessarily places communities of color and working-class communities at the margins of society ripe for continued oppression.

The Emotional and Academic Effects of Raceclassist Microaggressions

As a group, first-generation and low-income college students of color are more likely to experience difficulty in achieving success in higher education compared to their higher income counterparts with a family history of college-going (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). As we posit that raceclassist micro-aggressions truncate the successful college trajectory of first-generation and low-income college students of color, the logical conclusion is that this is no coincidence; this is the dance of raceclassism operating at the systemic level in U.S. education. The effect of these types of experiences, along with all the microaggressions not covered in this reflection, serve to reinforce the dominance of Whiteness while "othering" one of our authors and the communities to which she belongs (Gillborn, 2005). But, how does this raceclass dance and related microaggressions emotionally impact first-generation and low-income college students of color in particular? We pose three chief effects of raceclassist microaggressions on racially and economically minoritized students:

First, we propose that raceclassist micro-aggressions have a deeper emotional effect on low-income and first-generation college students of color because they lie at the intersection of multiple identities. In the case of Sarcedo's counterstory, on an emotional level, she felt attacked as a racially minoritized person, a person from a poor family,

and as a first-generation college student. It is not just the one-dimensional impact of a single identity such as just race or just class but the intersectionality of both identities at work (Museus & Griffin, 2011). That is, these types of experiences damaged how she saw herself as a college student within her racially and economically minoritized communities. This emotionality aligns with the finding by Solórzano et al. (2000) that students felt "personally diminished" as a result of racial microaggressions in an academic setting (p. 67). If, as Boler (1999) suggested, emotions are not felt, expressed, and/or conceptualized in a vacuum, isolated from the power relations found in the social context for which they are felt, expressed, and/or conceptualized, then Sarcedo's feelings are an example of how the power structures of race and class commingle. Plainly, her feelings of being marginalized, hurt, isolated, and dehumanized are results of how the power structures of both race and class collide and collude. As such, the nature of raceclassist microaggressions, which attack racially and economically minoritized students on multiple levels at once, have an intensified impact. Just as Matias (2013) argued that the intersections of gender and race impacts her teaching experiences such that she must employ a pedagogy of trauma to survive, raceclassed, minoritized college students are depending on similar survival mechanisms that nonetheless take an emotional toll.

Next, we posit that an important consequence of this heavy emotional toll for Sarcedo is that it became difficult to visualize herself succeeding at the university level in a process similar to internalized racism. This is aptly captured in Sarcedo's feeling that she *didn't belong in that conversation, in that classroom, or at that university*. We advance one explanation for this emotional turmoil might be found in Collier and Morgan's (2008) focus group examination of first-generation college students versus col-

lege students with a family history of college attendance and students' understanding of professor expectations. They suggested that college students' success is a function of how well they can master the *college student role*. This college student role includes an implicit understanding of expectations and behaviors that are necessary to be a successful college student. Experiencing relentless raceclassist microaggressions influences how first-generation and low-income college students of color approach the formation of the college student role. For Collier and Morgan (2008), drawing from a symbolic interactionist-based role theory, the college student role serves as a resource that students can utilize to reach their goals through interactions with others. However, when first-generation and low-income college students of color experience the sting of raceclassist microaggressions, those microaggressions quickly become a roadblock to a successful interaction with the peer, staff, or faculty member responsible for unleashing the subtle act of maintaining White supremacy.

Returning to the counterstory, imagine if Piper had simply commiserated with Sarcedo about taking IB classes without the microaggressions or if the group had not laughed at her for not knowing about the GRE. Perhaps Sarcedo would have felt she had an academic ally in her peers rather than feeling a deep sense of isolation from her peers *as if she weren't even there*. Sarcedo's internalized sense that she was not on equal footing with her classmates interrupted the formation of an academic and personal bond with her classmates; it prevented her from being able to build a relationship with them, which, according to Collier and Morgan (2008), would have played a valuable role in college success. Instead, the multiple microaggressions prevented Sarcedo from seeing herself succeeding in the college student role because it was laughable in her peers' estimation. Drawing from this, experiencing

raceclassist microaggressions disrupts the successful formation of the college student role and prevents role mastery for first-generation and low-income college students of color.

The last and perhaps most devastating emotional impact of raceclassist microaggressions is the implicit message that first-generation and low-income college students of color receive: they are not supposed to be in college. This message of exclusion from college and the campus community is perpetuated without ever being told this explicitly because it is couched within the formidable combination of facing raceclassist microaggressions while being prevented from forming a successful college student role. When her classmates assumed that Sarcedo was not intellectually capable of taking IB classes in high school or attending graduate school, the underlying implication was that she was not nor should she be part of the system that endorses these educational milestones. Microaggressions, especially microinsults and microinvalidations, come replete with hidden messages and assumptions (Sue et al., 2007). These subtle digs and the resultant isolation Sarcedo felt represent one small piece in the "profound patterns of exclusion" in higher education that serve to further disadvantage students of color (Hiraldo, 2010, p. 54).

In being attacked on multiple fronts by fellow students, faculty, and staff, raceclassist microaggressions targeted at first-generation and low-income students of color contribute to students' perception of the college environment as being less supportive toward them (Solórzano et al., 2000). This is a consequence of the feelings of isolation felt by students of color, the systemically imposed prevention of first-generation and low-income students of color from connecting with the college student role, and the implicit messaging that excludes racially

and economically minoritized students from their campus communities. In these ways, raceclassist microaggressions contribute to reduced positive outcomes for first-generation and low-income college students of color because they maintain White supremacy through attacking students' integrity as college students while further marginalizing students as part of communities of color from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds.

Recommendations for Practice in Higher Education Student Affairs

In considering the damaging nature of raceclassist microaggressions toward first-generation and low-income college students of color illustrated above, it is pertinent to consider how higher education institutions can potentially prevent this harm toward racially and economically minoritized college students and halt the destructive dance between race and class in higher education. It is important to note that although our examination of raceclassist microaggressions focused on the individual experience as a unit of analysis, that microaggressions are perpetrated by individuals while serving as part of an institution to bolster Whiteness (Solórzano et al., 2000) and capitalism (Johnson, 2006), so our recommendations also focus on institutional change. Likewise, Gusa (2010) suggested increased institutional attention toward nurturing minoritized students in the face of the hegemony and power of Whiteness in calling for "an institutional praxis that would reflect on and address the structural forces present in the ordinary, day-to-day interactions among students, between students and faculty/administrators, and between students and institutional policies and practices" (p. 480). Those ordinary, day-to-day interactions often take the form of raceclassist microaggressions. Thus, our first recommendation of a possible way to nurture minoritized

students is to raise awareness of Whiteness, which Brunsma, Brown, and Placier (2013) and Gusa (2010) pointed out, is endemic in higher education, and how Whiteness manifests inside higher education and is expressed through microaggressions. This is of chief importance because Whiteness, like a microaggression, lies below the surface and stays hidden from view in such a way to allow its destructive lifecycle to continue unchallenged. Particularly, instead of focusing on how minoritized students can identify Whiteness, there needs to be institutionally supported programs that raise awareness of Whiteness to the majority of White students, staff, and faculty. In doing so, the campus community at large can gain awareness of how their actions, beliefs, and speech can impart raceclassist microaggressions, despite whether or not they intended to do so. This could be achieved by integrating sustained awareness campaigns into existing student affairs programs such as orientations, freshmen seminars, service learning, and student leadership development while promoting staff professional development opportunities that also support these programming efforts.

Within higher education and student affairs practice, this institutional praxis should also encompass reducing the material power of institutional structures that prevent student success as a way of halting the coercive dance between race and class in higher education (Leonardo, 2013). Gusa (2010) put forth that higher education must address the structural, programmatic, and social aspects of diversity in order to improve conditions for racially and economically minoritized college students. That is, instead of focusing solely on symptoms such as microaggressions and racism, institutions must start addressing the disease itself, which is Whiteness and White supremacy, within the campus climate. Solórzano et al. (2000) indicated that a campus climate welcoming to racially minoritized college students includes

inclusivity of students, staff, and faculty of color, curriculum relevant to people of color, support for recruitment, retention, and graduation of students of color, and a campus-wide mission that supports these efforts. Therefore, progressive and purposeful student affairs programming that is tied to campus-based policy changes, all in the name of creating and fostering a truly inclusive campus climate that supports first-generation and low-income college students of color, is necessary.

We posit that another potential way for student affairs to redress the emotional turmoil inflicted upon first-generation and low-income college students of color by raceclassist microaggressions is to work to empower students of color while disempowering the raceclassist hierarchy on campus. hooks (2006) suggested empowering minoritized groups, rather than promoting a sense of shared victimization, as a way to build agency. Student affairs programming could do so through workshops, activities, and roundtable sessions exclusively for racially and economically minoritized college students. Through closed spaces designated for students of color and low-income students, especially at predominantly White institutions of higher education, student affairs professionals can prevent campus spaces from representing White spaces, which alienate students of color while masking contemporary color-blind racism from White students (Cabrera, 2014). Similarly, faculty can promote empowerment of minoritized students in their classrooms by becoming "comfortable with addressing race issues, validat[ing] feelings experienced by students of color, legitimiz[ing] a different racial reality, and exhibit[ing] good communication and facilitation skills" (Sue et al., 2009, p. 188). Whether through student affairs programming or in a classroom, shared space and shared opportunity, especially where none existed before because the institution did not provide for it, can lead to

shared success for racially and economically minoritized college students.

However, these types of changes must be done without putting the onus for success on racially and economically minoritized college students, as Pike and Kuh's (2005) deficit-thinking mentioned earlier suggests. The call for an institutional praxis requires that the impetus for change is driven by the institution and not exclusively prompted by minoritized students themselves; for if the institution does not make explicit attempts to support students of color, they ultimately fail students of color. Student affairs remains one such avenue for this type of instructional praxis because it touches upon college students' academic, personal, and social lives and is typically well integrated into the fabric of an institution. Student affairs has the potential to enact best and promising practices to improve the outcomes for first-generation and low-income college students of color without making it the students' responsibility.

Conclusion

The above theoretical raceclass analysis and resultant suggescesent avenues for future research into the impact and ways to break down the destructive effects of Whiteness, racism, and capitalism as they pertain to racially and economically minoritized college students who face relentless raceclassist microaggressions on college campuses. Student affairs has the ability to prevent first-generation and low-income college students of color from being thrust into the middle of the dirty dance between race and class in education.

In applying Leonardo's (2013) call for raceclass application, we offer one portraiture of a raceclass analysis that illustrates how raceclassist microaggressions impact the emotional and academic experiences of racially and economically minoritized

college students. Using counterstorytelling methodologies, we illustrate how raceclassist microaggressions are enacted in the college classroom and how those enactments impact minoritized students. Notwithstanding the inhumanity of research that ignores the emotionalities that prevent academic success, we posit how raceclassist microaggressions cause students to develop a sense of isolation, interrupt how students master the college student role, and perpetuate the message that racially and economically minoritized students do not belong in college, all of which are pivotal in understanding the academic experiences of first-generation and low-income college students of color. The collision and collusion of race and class all too often represents a dirty dance that batters and bruises minoritized students throughout their educational journey. With each advancing step of the dance, race and class lockstep racially and economically minoritized students into two choices in response to the dance: (1) to succumb to its aggressiveness and become an unwilling dancer, perpetuating the destructive cycles of Whiteness, racism, and capitalism within their own communities or (2) to dodge it constantly by learning mechanisms of survival that nonetheless take an emotional toll. To mitigate these untenable choices, we, as scholars, educators, and student affairs professionals committed to equitable education, must work to halt the coercive dance between race and class on our campuses in order to allow first-generation and low-income college students of color to flourish.

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